Letter of the President of the Wellington, Grey & Bruce Railway to the Warden of Bruce—Able exposure of the narrow plan for obtaining a bonus without the consent of the ratepayers.

WELLINGTON, GREY AND BRUCE RAILWAY.

HAMILTON, Ont., Nov. 22, 1870.

To John Gillies, Warden, and the Council of the County of Bruce:

DEAR SIRS,—You will have seen that the Narrow Gauge Company, after being fairly beaten in Bruce, appealed to the Ontario Legislature for an amendment in its Charter which would facilitate it in obtaining the assistance which it never could otherwise have obtained from the County Council and the people of Bruce. In some way, the amendment was smuggled through the House, without any of our friends apparently discovering its character or its objects, and Mr. Laidlaw, as you are doubtless aware, is now trying to work it to advantage both in Bruce and Grey.

The Act, in brief, gives the narrow-gauge Company the power to group together any number of the townships of a county in which it considers the aggregate majority of the ratepayers may be favorably disposed towards it, and virtually to constitute the townships so grouped a new municipality for the purpose of granting a narrow gauge bonus. It is not left optional with the townships whether or not they shall be included in the scheme—it is enough that they shall "be asked," provided only that a majority of the Reeves and Deputy-Reeves can be induced to sign a petition to the County Council, asking that body to submit a By-Law to the ratepayers of the section selected; thus, as is the fact, in the County of Grey, eleven townships may be selected, the Reeves and Deputy-Reeves of five of these townships may be utterly opposed to the scheme and refuse to sign the petition, but if those of the other six—being a majority—comply, the refusal of the minority will not save these townships from being involved in the scheme. Similarly in voting at the polls, all the ratepayers in the five townships may vote against the By-law; but if those in the other six who vote in favor of it prove to be the majority, then the whole eleven townships are mulcted in the amount of the bonus. In short, the narrow gauge company is invested with the power of creating a county within a county, for the purpose of granting a narrow gauge bonus, and this is the only Act it can legally perform. Should the vote at the polls go in favor of the By-law, the County Council have no option with regard to its ratification. The Act distinctly says that the Council "shall pass" the By-law.

I think you will agree with me that a piece of legislation which breaks up the Municipal Corporations of the country—which deprives County Councils of a power which they have hitherto had and have not abused—is an iniquitous measure which ought to be resisted in every way while it is in force, and repealed at the earliest possible moment. If any such change were needed in our municipal system the people interested ought to have been consulted, or, at least, informed that it was in contemplation. No other Company now has, and no other Company ever had, the power which this Act confers upon the Narrow Gauge Company.

As Mr. Laidlaw is now trying to manipulate the Southern township of Bruce, you will probably be called upon to consider the matter in your official capacity. The Act is so ingeniously worded, that a casual reader might be excused for falling into the error that the County Council is not only bound to ratify the by-law, should it receive the approval of the majority of the ratepayers, but that it is also bound to submit it to them upon the petition of the majority of the Reeves and Deputy Reeves; and, as a matter of fact, it was under this misapprehension that the County Council of Grey submitted their by-law. A careful reading of the 5th section, however, will show you that this is not the fact—that the County Council is under no legal obligation to submit the by-law at all—and if you agree with me, that the intended operation of the Act ought to be defeated in every legitimate way. I take the liberty of suggesting that the proper point for resisting Mr. Laidlaw's scheme in Bruce will be when the petition of the Reeves and Deputy Reeves is presented to your County Council, should the plan reach that stage. If the Council refuse to submit the By-law, the scheme is effectually check-mated. Should the Council think it wise to go further and demand a repeal of this flagrant violation of Municipal rights, I can assure you of our hearty support in this quarter, and it seems to me that steps, with this end in view, ought to be taken immediately.

In answer to this, I am aware it may be said that the operation of the law is no worse than the case of a Township voting against a County bonus and being compelled to pay their portion of it, but you will not fail to observe an essential distinction between an appeal to the recognized Municipal bodies of the country, marked by boundaries to which presumably all have consented, and an appeal to a body called into existence for the sole purpose of securing the success of that appeal, and ceasing to exist as soon as the end is served. If the Company of which I have the honor to be President could have carved out the County of Bruce in the same way in 1869, the difficulty of securing our bonus would have been very little indeed.

You have a practical example of the mischievous working of this Act in your township of Carrick, which is included in Mr. Laidlaw's division of Bruce. Now, the people of Carrick have been made parties to the present plan at the sole will and pleasure of the Narrow Gauge Company, acting under the authority of an Act passed without the consent of the people of that township, and against which they had no opportunity of protesting—of which not one of them probably had any knowledge, until it came threatening them with the forcible appropriation of a portion of their earnings, to be applied to the building of a railway which they have no need for, and which they have clearly shown they have no desire for.

I have the honor to be, dear Sirs,

Yours faithfully,

WM. MCGIVERIN,

President.